

Message Text

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TAGS: MARR, MILI, PARM, UK, NATO

SUBJECT: UK DEFENSE REVIEW

1. BRITISH ARE APPREHENSIVE OVER WAY DPC WILL HANDLE MC ASSESSMENT OF UK DEFENSE REVIEW, APPROVED 3 FEB. MAYNE (HEAD, DS-22, MOD) TELLS US HMG IS HOPEFUL THAT NATO'S REPLY TO 3 DEC 74 BRITISH PRESENTATION WILL NOT "APPLY THE STICK" TOO HARSHLY, WILL RECOGNIZE BRITAIN'S REAL NEED FOR ECONOMIES IN DEFENSE AND WILL ONLY ASK FOR "LOW COST, NO COST" ADD ONS AND PERHAPS RECONSIDERATION OF CUTS IN "A FEW" AREAS VIEWED AS ABSOLUTELY VITAL TO NATO. MAYNE REITERATED HOW DIFFICULT IT HAD BEEN TO GET INITIAL CABINET APPROVAL OF THE DEFENSE REVIEW (WHICH MAYNE DESCRIBED AS A REAL TRIUMPH FOR PRIME MINISTER WILSON'S PERSONAL POLITICAL SKILL) AND SAID THE TONE OF THE LUNS RESPONSE WILL BE EXTREMELY IMPORTANT TO WILSON AS HE MOVES FOR FINAL APPROVAL. TOO TOUGH A REJOINDER, HE SUGGESTED, MIGHT WELL CAUSE A COALESCENCE OF ELEMENTS OF THE CABINET AND PARTY COVETOUS OF DEFENSE MONIES, OPPOSED TO EUROPE AND INDIFFERENT TOWARD NATO.

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2. ONE ASPECT OF THIS POTENTIAL PROBLEM HAS SURFACED THIS WEEK WITH PUBLICATION OF A MEMORANDUM FROM DEFENSE SECRETARY MASON TO THE LABOR PARTY'S DEFENSE GROUP, WHICH HAD ASKED FOR MASON'S ASSESSMENT OF THE EFFECT OF DEFENSE CUTS OF 1,000 POUNDS A YEAR, DEMANDED AT THE 1973 LABOR PARTY CONFERENCE. THE MASON MEMORANDUM, WRITTEN IN RESPONSE TO A REQUEST BY THE DEFENSE GROUP'S RIGHT WING AND ATLANTICIST CHAIRMAN, SIR GEOFFREY DE FREITAS (CLEARLY PART OF THE GOVERNMENT'S CAREFULLY ORCHESTRATED CAMPAIGN TO GAIN APPROVAL OF THE DEFENSE REVIEW FROM A LESS THAN ENTHUSIASTIC LABOR PARTY), SAID SUCH CUTS WOULD COST 350,000 JOBS, EMASCULATE BRITAIN'S FORCES, FORCE THE CANCELLATION OF MAJOR REEQUIPMENT PROGRAMS LIKE THE MRCA, AND DAMAGE PROGRESS TOWARD DETENTE AND DISARMAMENT.

3. NATO CONSULTATIONS AT POLITICAL LEVEL ON THE DEFENSE REVIEW ARE SCHEDULED TO BEGIN FORMALLY ON 5 FEBRUARY. WE BELIEVE THE APPROACH ADOPTED BY THE U.S. TOWARD THE DEFENSE REVIEW IN EARLY NOVEMBER AND MAINTAINED SINCE THAT TIME (I.E., DEPLORING CUTS IN SPENDING BUT UNDERSTANDING HMG'S ANALYSIS THAT SUCH REDUCTIONS ARE A POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC NECESSITY; REGRETING BUT NOT TRYING TO REVERSE REDUCTIONS IN AREAS NOT CONSIDERED VITAL TO THE US AND NATO; AND SEEKING TO ALTER PRELIMINARY JUDGMENTS (E.G. IN THE CASES OF CYPRUS AND MASIRAH) WHERE WE SENSE EQUIVOCATION OR BELIEVE THE ISSUE IS OF PARTICULAR IMPORTANCE IS JUST RIGHT. IF NATO AUTHORITIES CAN ALSO COME TO ADOPT THE SAME GENERAL APPROACH, WE ARE HOPEFUL THE GOVERNMENT WILL BE ABLE TO GAIN FINAL CABINET AND PARLIAMENTARY APPROVAL WITHOUT FURTHER CUTS. THE KNIVES STILL ARE OUT FOR DEFENSE WITHIN LABOR RANKS, HOWEVER, AND WE SHARE MOD'S CONCERN THAT NATO'S RESPONSE BE COUCHED IN AS HELPFUL A TONE AS POSSIBLE AND THAT AREAS SINGLED OUT FOR DISCUSSION BE CHOSEN FOR THEIR PRACTICALITY AS WELL AS THEIR IMPACT BOTH IN WHITEHALL AND IN OTHER NATO CAPITALS.

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